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ABSTRACT

During the state of transition in contemporary Russia from communism to a market economy, nonprofit organizations have been thrust into the forefront to provide to youth and families services formerly rendered by the government. This paper describes Moscow Charity House (MCH) and Nevsky Angel in St. Petersburg, the first nonprofit organizations in Russia, with regard to their importance to the future of nonprofit groups in Russia. More Russian families must assume active volunteer roles in local communities if the quality of Russian life is to be maintained and improved. Nonprofit agencies face increasing challenges in providing adequate public programs and services for families, youth, and adults. These challenges include crime, poverty, housing, homelessness, education, health and medical care, unemployment, and youth problems. MCH was founded in 1991 to create a network of long-term assistance to poor, elderly, and disabled in Moscow, and eventually in other Russian cities. MCH has established programs that can be used as demonstration models for other Russian cities. Nevsky Angel was one of the first nonprofit independent organizations supported by the public and was founded in 1988. This program also delivers assistance to children, families, and the elderly and develops working models for social, educational charitable programs. Both organizations are in constant need of support and desire national assistance and international cooperation. The need for volunteers continues to grow, and only through grassroots participation will government agencies and nonprofit organizations address the problems facing Russia's urban population. (KB)

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PROMOTING POSITIVE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN RUSSIAN COMMUNITIES THROUGH VOLUNTEER AGENCIES[1]

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Russian society is in a state of transition. Nonprofit organizations have been thrust into the forefront of Russian society to provide services once rendered by its government, services desperately needed by youth and their families. For democracy to work in Russia, families must be active agents of positive change in neighborhoods, communities, and the larger society. Positive social change results from the direct participation of adults and youth in voluntary and volunteer opportunities. The first nonprofit organizations in Russia (Moscow Charity House and Nevsky Angel - St. Petersburg) are discussed as critically important for nonprofit volunteer groups to either flourish or fail in the future. This theoretical paper argues that more Russian families (youth and adults) must assume active volunteer roles in local communities if the quality of Russian life is to be maintained and improved.

PROMOTING POSITIVE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN RUSSIAN COMMUNITIES THROUGH VOLUNTEER AGENCIES

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, Soviet Premier Gorbachev implemented *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) in the Soviet Union. Since then, enormous political changes have occurred, including the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and the rise of democracy in Russia under President Yeltsin. With *glasnost*, many formally "hidden" social ills and problems have become visible to the rest of the world. Some of these include poverty, housing shortages, organized crime, divorce, and psychopathology across all age groups (Erlanger, 1992; Handleman, 1995).

For democracy to work in Russia, families must be active agents of positive change in neighborhoods, communities, and the larger society. Positive social change results from the direct participation of adults and youth in voluntary and volunteer opportunities. According to the executive director of a Moscow nonprofit, "if democracy is to grow, yes even survive, we must build it from the bottom up ... people helping people... and volunteerism is the tool we must use" (personal communication, November 8, 1995).

PURPOSE

Contemporary Russian society is in a state of transition. Nonprofit organizations have been thrust into the forefront of Russian society to provide services once rendered by its government, services desperately needed by youth and their families. The first nonprofit organizations in Russia (Moscow Charity House and Nevsky Angel - St. Petersburg) are discussed as critically important for nonprofit

volunteer groups to either flourish or fail in the future. This theoretical paper argues that more Russian families (youth and adults) must assume active volunteer roles in local communities if the quality of Russian life is to be maintained and improved.

METHODS (Theoretical/Philosophical Themes)

Nonprofit agencies in contemporary Russian society face increasing challenges in providing adequate public programs and services for families, youth and adults. These challenges include, but are not restricted to, problems addressing crime, poverty, housing, the homeless, education, health and medical care, unemployment, and youth. Although these problems exist in all communities, they are especially apparent in cities and surrounding urban communities where large numbers of individuals live and work in a concentrated area (e.g., Moscow and St. Petersburg). Because of changes in government and politics, nonprofit organizations are having to replace former government sponsored programs for supporting Russian individuals and families. Two of these nonprofit organizations are Moscow Charity House and Nevsky Angel (St. Petersburg).

Moscow Charity House (MCH) was founded in September 1991 as a non-governmental and nonprofit charity to create a network of long term assistance to the poor, the elderly, and the disabled in Moscow, and eventually in other Russian cities. MCH had been requested by the Moscow City Council to conduct all of the social services previously provided by the Moscow government under communism. This expectation was repeated in October 1993 when MCH was again requested by the city council to provide such services. To achieve these goals, MCH aims to establish socially important programs and projects for Moscow and the Moscow region that can be used as demonstration models for other Russian cities.

Nevsky Angel is one of the first nonprofit independent organizations supported by the public,

and began as the St. Petersburg Charity Society in 1988. Five major principles govern the Society: 1) democratic administration; 2) support for creative social initiatives for the benefit of humanity; 3) volunteer involvement; 4) assistance to families, children and the elderly; and 5) the creation of working models for social, educational charitable programs and projects.

Both Moscow Charity House and Nevsky Angel have not had the luxury of extensive past experiences in human services; therefore, these organizations are in constant need of support. Both groups desire not only public assistance in Russia, but also international cooperation. For example, Moscow Charity House has, for three years, collaborated with the U.S. Points of Light Foundation to provide technical training and assistance to constituency groups. However, individuals and families must care enough to become actively involved in their local communities as volunteers if present programs are to be maintained or expanded. A new popular attitude is needed based on a human obligation of one person helping another.

CONCLUSIONS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE

The need for volunteers in Russia's communities continues to grow. Only through grass-roots participation will government agencies and nonprofit organizations successfully identify and address the issues facing Russia's urban population. In recent years, Moscow Charity House and Nevsky Angel have played important roles in the coordination of volunteer efforts with local neighborhoods and communities. To maximize local human and financial resources, it is vital to encourage Russian families and individuals to become involved as volunteers in the provision of human and community services; beyond these services, there is a need to involve Russian volunteers in the many and varied activities that contribute to the quality of community life. Volunteer human service providers (e.g., Moscow Charity House and Nevsky Angel) are going to be vital in filling the gap left by government-

sponsored programs serving the community. With individual and family involvement in volunteer agencies, both system levels (family and community) will benefit with services for the elderly, community crime reduction, child and youth services, and other areas of importance.

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